



Michael Psellus, the Byzantine Historian

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SCOTLAND

Edinburgh, University Library, *MS. 131*, fol. 55^r. Paper; 14.1×21 cm.; 177 folios. Fifteenth century.¹ This folio contains at least recipes nos 291, 292 (146), and is included in Mrs Singer's no. 641 under the title, *Practica optima*.

Glasgow, Glasgow University, Hunterian Museum Library, *MS. 110*, fol. 39^v–40^r (olim 41^v–42^r). Parchment; 9×6½ inches; 74 folios.² Fourteenth century (*ibid.*). These folios contain at least recipes nos A1, A2, A6, and are included in the first section of the *Secretum Philosophorum* (Singer, II, 722, under no. 1078). This manuscript, the most extensive known of the *M.C.*, with the exception of the *Phillipps MS. 3715*, contains on fol. 9^v–23^v, 248 *M.C.* recipes.³ Nos A1, A2, A6, are repeated on fol. 39^v–40^r.

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MICHAEL PSELLUS, THE BYZANTINE HISTORIAN

By JOAN HUSSEY

'I have hastily reviewed, and gladly dismiss this shameful and destructive period of twenty-eight years, in which the Greeks, degraded below the common level of servitude, were transferred like a herd of cattle by the choice or caprice of two impotent females,'⁴ wrote Gibbon of the years 1028–57, and even with the rise of the Comneni in the second half of the eleventh century he could see but faint hope for an Empire so immersed in 'this night of slavery.' It was during this period that Michael Psellus lived and wrote, but it was a time of political difficulties, for the Slavs, Turks, and western 'barbarians' caused unending complications in external politics, while at Constantinople one unfortunate Emperor after another discovered that there was no such thing as the 'harbour of Empire'⁵ which Constantine IX had vainly imagined he would find in the imperial throne. But such problems were almost a matter of course at Byzantium and did not hinder the enthusiasm for learning which is evident in the eleventh century. Constantine IX may have reopened the University at Constantinople in 1045 in order to provide an efficient legal training, but he also acted in response to those men whose intellectual activity gave a lasting impetus to scholarship and especially to philosophical studies. Of these Michael Psellus, with his vast literary output, is the best known. This remarkable man, while living an arduous life as government official and imperial adviser, was continually deepening his encyclopaedic knowledge and inspiring his pupils to fresh endeavor, and yet he found time to write one of the most living histories of his time.⁶ In its conception of the

¹ Singer, II, 445, under no. 641; Catherine R. Borland, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Western Mediaeval Manuscripts in Edinburgh University Library* (Edinburgh, 1916), pp. 206–208.

² John Young and P. H. Aitken, *A Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of the Hunterian Museum in the University of Glasgow* (Glasgow, 1908), pp. 111–112.

³ See the previous section of this study under manuscript 12.

⁴ E. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (ed. J. B. Bury, London, 1898), v, 220.

⁵ Psellus, *Chronographia*, VI, 178 (ed. Renauld, II, 58), τοῦ βασιλείου λιμένας.

⁶ This is now available in an accessible edition with a French translation (Psellus, *Chronographia*, ed. E. Renauld, 2 vols., Paris, 1926–28). The references are throughout to this edition, the figures in

historian's function and its psychological insight it remains outstandingly 'modern;' in its vivid descriptions and its literary background it gives an unrivalled picture of the period and the author.

The *Chronographia* is, then, a valuable source for the history of the eleventh century, and, in spite of its personal tone, it is more than a memoir, while by reason of its contents and arrangement it is certainly more than a chronicle. Psellus himself gives his reason for writing the *Chronographia*. He first says, 'Many people have often asked me to write the history of my own day, not only those in authority who sat in the first rank of the senate, but those who were dedicated to the mysteries of the Logos, possessing souls of a higher and more godly nature.'¹ He then explains that the reason which lay behind this request was the fear that the events of their age would pass into oblivion for lack of an historian.² He adds, 'For you, most beloved of all men, who asked me to write, not a more ambitious history (συγγραφὴν φιλοτιμοτέραν) but a more brief summary.'³ The identity of this friend has been frequently discussed and it is generally agreed that it was Leichudes,⁴ the friend of Psellus' student days, who was for a time the valued counsellor of Constantine ix (1042–55), and finally Patriarch of Constantinople until his death in 1063.

But on reaching the last chapters of the *Chronographia* apparent inconsistencies arise, because Psellus says that he has promised to write of Constantine x Ducas (1059–67),⁵ and then later that Michael vii (1071–78) himself gave him the material for his own reign.⁶ It becomes clear that the *Chronographia* is not a single narrative, and closer examination of its structure reveals two histories, the first being the authentic and original written at the request of a friend, the second written late in life to please Michael vii.

The structure of the *Chronographia* falls then into two definite sections—from Basil ii to the end of Isaac Comnenus (976–1059), and from Constantine x to Michael vii (1059–78). Scattered throughout the text there is abundant evidence to justify the conclusion that the first section was the original history and that the second was written some time afterwards, and added to the first part after the death of Psellus. Moreover the opening title⁷ was obviously written for the first part of the *Chronographia*, since it mentions all the Emperors' names down to the proclamation of Constantine x Ducas, at which point Psellus has already said he will terminate his history, 'When I have recounted how he (i.e., Isaac Comnenus) weakened the boundary of the kingdom, I shall bring my history

brackets referring to the volume and page. A number of errors in text and translation are noted in the reviews of J. Sykutris, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, xxvii (1927), 99–105, xxix (1929), 40–48, and H. Grégoire, *Byzantion*, ii (1925), 550–567, iv (1927–28), 716–728.

¹ *Chron.*, vi, 22 (i, 127).

² The conventional excuse of the historian. Cf. Attaliates' Introduction, 'that things worthy of narrative may not be overwhelmed in the profundities of oblivion by the lapse of time, but may obtain an everlasting memorial,' *Historia*, 8 (*Corpus scriptorum historiae byzantinae*).

³ *Chron.*, vi, 73 (i, 152).

⁴ Cf. Sykutris, 'Zum Geschichtswerk des Psellos,' *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, xxx (1929–30), 62, note 1.

⁵ *Chron.*, viia, 5 (ii, 140).

⁶ *Ibid.*, viic, 11 (ii, 177–178).

⁷ Sykutris says this was not written by Psellus (*op. cit.*, p. 62, note 5).

to an end.¹ The first part must have been published before Leichudes' death, since he is mentioned in it as being alive, but after the oration on Michael Cerularius, since Psellus there implies that the history is not published.² Leichudes died in August, 1063, and the funeral oration on Michael Cerularius was delivered in the opening years of Constantine x's reign. The date of the publication of the first part is therefore limited to the years 1059 (December)–1063 (August). It may be suggested that the honor of the oration would hardly be given to Cerularius while his opponent, the abdicated Isaac Comnenus, who was on good terms with Constantine x, was still living, in which case the possible years are 1061–63.³

The second part of the *Chronographia* is quite different in tone from the first, and its unrestrained flattery is often used as a reproach to Psellus' capacity as an historian. It is not difficult to account for this difference, since Psellus must have been actually writing the continuation in the reign of Michael himself; he says at the beginning of this part that he will proceed to describe the history of Michael's reign immediately after that of his father.⁴ The date can be fixed even more precisely since he says that he has seen the little Constantine, the son of Michael Ducas, as a babe,⁵ which could only have been in 1075.⁶ Psellus obviously realized the difficulties which attended any attempt at historical truth, and he almost apologized for his eulogistic account of Michael vii,⁷ implying that he had no choice in the matter, and at the same time he almost automatically inserted occasional protests that he was adhering strictly to the truth. Perhaps he thought that their omission would be ominous, since similar protests appear with such frequency in the first part. The second part must have been intended by Psellus to be a sequel to the first, for although he meant to stop at the end of Isaac Comnenus' reign, he does say, when he reaches that point, that he will continue his narrative (διηγῆσομαι) at some future date;⁸ when he mentions Isaac Comnenus in the second part he says that he will not repeat the same thing twice, since he has already described this reign in the first part.⁹ But certain inconsistencies indicate that the second part was first published with the original history after the death of Psellus. Had he himself edited his work he surely would have arranged the second part in books to correspond with his previous arrangement in which each reign has a book to itself; in the *Chronographia* as we have it the second part is included in the seventh book, which really belongs to Isaac Comnenus' reign. Nor do the end of the first part and the beginning of the second correspond with each other in any way, a matter of arrangement which Psellus himself would have altered. Further, there is a notable omission in the present *Chronographia* — it has no preface.¹⁰ Either Psellus meant to write one,

¹ *Chron.*, vii, 51 (ii, 115).

² Psellus, 'Funeral oration on the Patriarch Michael Cerularius,' ed. K. N. Sathas, *Bibliotheca graeca medii aevi*, iv (1874), 323. For the details of the date of the first publication see Sykutris, *op. cit.*, p. 63. ³ Cf. Sykutris, *op. cit.*, p. 63 ff. ⁴ *Chron.*, viia, 6 (ii, 141). ⁵ *Ibid.*, viib, 12 (ii, 178).

⁶ Anna Comnena, *Alexias*, iii, 1. (*Corpus script. hist. byz.*, i, 136.)

⁷ *Chron.*, viic, 1 (ii, 172).

⁸ *Ibid.*, vii, 92 (ii, 138).

⁹ *Ibid.*, viia, 8 (ii, 142).

¹⁰ Cf. Leo the Deacon, Michael Attaliates; see H. Lieberich, *Studien zur den Proömien in der*

but died before he did so, or else he felt that since his work was a direct continuation of Leo the Deacon it did not need one: in any case the first part was published during his lifetime without any preface. Sykutris deduces moreover from the words 'For you, most beloved of all men, asked me to write, not a more ambitious history, but a briefer summary,'¹ that Psellus had written, or had certainly intended to write, a preface. He bases his argument on the supposition that Psellus would not have used the familiar second person singular in a published work, unless he had previously explained to whom he was referring.² But, whatever may be the true explanation, it is not for lack of material that the preface is missing. Psellus' history abounds in digressions, some of which could with advantage have been condensed into the form of a preface.

Thus Psellus does not omit to indicate what he considers to be the function of an historian. Truth—that is both the beginning and end of history (τὴν ἱστορίαν, ἥς τὸ κράτιστον ἡ ἀλήθεια).³ It is when he reaches Constantine ix Monomachus that Psellus, perhaps mindful of his partiality for this Emperor, sets forth at some length his conception of the historian's art:

Now he who writes a history uses his words carefully to give just the right balance, nor does he equivocate when presenting either worthy or shameful actions, but he tells his story in a simple and true narrative, and should there be among those of whom he is speaking one who is a good man but who neglects him, or one who though of an opposite nature has done him some service, yet he will not consider in his history what has been done to him of good or evil, but will place each in his narrative according to his own merit.⁴

Psellus, then, did not differ from Byzantine historians in his realization that history is the presentation of fact.⁵ In the same way that Anna Comnena speaks of the essential impartiality of the historian and the incongruity of πάθος in historical writings, so Psellus not only emphasizes the veracity of his information, but shows by a careful analysis what historians must avoid. He may have been aware of the weaknesses of his own temperament, for the very errors which he indicates are just those of which he himself was most likely to be guilty. Psellus considered that history must be carefully distinguished from other forms of writing; he says that he first of all hesitated to undertake the *Chronographia* lest he should find he was presenting events more in the form of a drama than a history.⁶ Having once embarked upon this task, he is still filled with anxiety, lest people should imagine that he has confused history and eulogy, so he is careful to point out that when he wrote panegyrics he passed over in silence many facts belonging to the realm of history,⁷ and that when he was writing history he was careful not to avail himself of any rhetorical devices that might obscure the truth.⁸ Psellus may have had an intuitive feeling that future generations (if

griechischen und byzantinischen Geschichtschreibung (Munich, 1899–1900), for a discussion of the prefaces of Byzantine historians.

¹ *Chron.*, vi, 73 (I, 127).

² *Op. cit.*, 61.

³ *Chron.*, vi, 26 (I, 130); cf. viib, 43 (II, 172).

⁴ *Ibid.*, vi, 161 (II, 50–51).

⁵ See G. G. Buckler, *Anna Comnena* (Oxford, 1929), pp. 225 ff. for a discussion of the Byzantine ideal of historiography.

⁶ *Chron.*, vi, 22 (I, 128).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 25 (I, 129).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 176 (II, 58).

not his contemporaries, as he more than once hints) might accuse him of partiality and a verbose style.

Not only did Psellus have a definite conception of the general aim of history, but he was equally clear about his own mode of presentation. He was not going to write a universal history, nor was he going beyond the limits of his own day. Like Anna Comnena and Attaliates, both of whom wrote after Psellus and therefore may have been influenced by him, he wished to narrate those things which he himself had seen: 'I am putting into writing those things which I myself have seen, and those events the truth of which I have perceived with my own eyes.'¹ He does not entirely confine himself to the events through which he had lived and he admits that some of his material he had obtained from others, who, he is careful to add, had themselves been eyewitnesses.² Even so these statements cannot be taken quite literally. However true it may be for the central portion of the *Chronographia*, the beginning, where Psellus takes up the thread of Leo the Deacon's narrative, was necessarily beyond his personal knowledge; although in justice to Psellus it must be admitted that it is correspondingly brief, and it is not until he reaches his contemporaries that he becomes more expansive. Psellus frankly makes no attempt to embrace every sphere of activity, giving as an excuse that his friend had demanded only a summary of important events:

That is the reason why I have passed over much that was worthy to be related and have measured my history not according to the Olympiads of years, nor, as the historian³ has done, have I divided it according to the seasons of the year, but I have simply set forth those things which were stored up in my memory at the time when I was writing. So, as I have said, I have now put aside any claim to quibble about each fact, and I would rather walk in the middle path between those who formerly wrote of the reigns and achievements of the elder Rome, and those who today are accustomed to compile chronicles. Thus I have sought to rival neither the prolixity of the writings of the former nor the compression of the latter, in order that my history may be neither too fulsome nor too brief.⁴

But to deduce from Psellus' own lofty profession that the *Chronographia* is a brief and impartial summary of the most salient features of his lifetime is to misjudge the author. In comparison with the *Chronographia* the Chronicles of most of his predecessors, and even his successors,⁵ seem dull and lifeless. The *Chronographia* owes its vitality and color to an author who was unable either to suppress his personality or to disguise his prejudices, and who was far more interested in mankind than in the affairs of state. He admits that he is more concerned with the intimate details of Constantine ix's life than with the public administration of his reign.⁶ He had studied his people and he recognized their weaknesses: 'if my account of the Emperor should seem to be filled with incon-

¹ *Ibid.*, iv, 3 (I, 87).

² *Ibid.*, iii, 23 (I, 48).

³ Thucydides.

⁴ *Chron.*, vi, 73 (I, 152-153). Cf. Anna Comnena, *Alexias*, xiv, 8: 'I am not writing about things that happened a thousand years ago.' She may have been influenced by Psellus, whom she certainly admired. Psellus does speak of writing a *συνοπτικὴν ἱστορίαν* (viii, 23, II, 149), but this is in the second part of the *Chronographia*, where he may have thought it judicious to suggest some excuse for those who might suspect the comparative brevity of his praise of Constantine x.

⁵ Anna Comnena is a notable exception.

⁶ *Chron.*, vi, 167 (II, 53).

sistencies, you must remember that it is true to life.¹ Psellus knew only too well that man was a vacillating animal (εὐμετάβλητον ζῶον).²

It is not only Psellus' knowledge of human nature, but the way in which he presents his material that accounts for the interest of the *Chronographia*. He says that 'the historical style should not be too polished'³ and apparently scorns the use of rhetorical arts in a history; yet his style belies his own words. 'Nul Byzantin ne marqua plus d'aptitude à sentir les beautés littéraires, nul ne les exprima avec plus d'éloquence et de sincérité.'⁴ But apart from the actual means by which Psellus obtains his effects, there are certain features which characterize the work, both as reflecting the temperament of the author and the atmosphere of the century. The *Chronographia* is essentially a story of people, nor is it ever possible to forget that it is being told by a man of marked personality; not only does Psellus describe George Maniaces, but he says, 'I have seen him and I admired him.'⁵ Among the most vivid of his pictures is that of Zoe and Theodora:

For the benefit of those who do not know them I will describe the Empresses. The elder, Zoe, had a soul quick in thought, but a tongue slow in speech. Theodora, on the contrary, was the very opposite, for she was slow to show what she desired, but, once she began, she conversed in an excellent and animated manner. Zoe, impatient for the fulfilment of her desires, held out her hand with equal alacrity to both extremes, I mean, to death and life, like a ship tossed on the waves of the sea, first raised up, then plunged into the depths. But Theodora was quite different for she had an evenly balanced, one might even say, a sluggish mind. The one had a prodigal hand and in a day squandered a veritable sea of gold dust, the other counted out each coin she gave, for she had no source from which she could thoughtlessly draw and by nature she had more control over herself in this respect. . . .⁶ The sisters were equally different in appearance. The elder was built on more ample lines than her sister, but was not so tall. Her large eyes were well entrenched under bushy eyebrows, and her nose was aquiline but in no way exaggerated, and she had yellow hair, and her whole body was dazzlingly white. There was little to show her age, and anybody who had observed the perfect harmony of her limbs without knowing how old she was, would have said that she was a young girl, for her body remained without a wrinkle, her flesh was soft and firm and full, and there was nowhere any loose skin. As for Theodora, she was taller and thinner, with a face that was not in proportion to the rest of her body, while, as I have said, she spoke and moved more quickly than her sister; she was not a gorgon in appearance, but pleasant and smiling and ready to chat.⁷

Such a passage shows that it is Psellus' capacity for detail that makes his descriptions so good, and he could be as graphic about events as about people, as when he describes the meeting of Basil II and Skleros.⁸ Nor does he confine himself to people, for he occasionally notices natural features, such as the sun and the tempest in the Russian War,⁹ even though in this instance he could hardly have avoided mentioning the element which was responsible for the destruction of the Russian fleet. But it is not by reason of a few outstanding passages that the *Chronographia* is distinguished from the chronicle. Every page of the text reflects its author's vitality and zest, and no isolated excerpts can compensate for lack of personal intimacy with so living a history.

¹ *Ibid.*, vi, 203 (II, 71).

² *Ibid.*, viib, 5 (II, 154).

³ *Ibid.*, vi, 70 (I, 151).

⁴ E. Renauld, *Etude de la langue et du style de Psellos* (Paris, 1920), 557.

⁵ *Chron.*, vi, 77 (II, 1).

⁶ *Chron.*, vi, 4 (I, 118-119).

⁷ *Ibid.*, vi, 6 (I, 120).

⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 27 (I, 16).

⁹ *Ibid.*, vi, 95 (II, 11).

It is, however, possible to indicate something of its historical value. Its deficiencies are obvious: Psellus' life and opinions intrude with such frequency that it becomes almost a personal memoir, and the familiar ἐγὼ γούν is rarely absent. Psellus gradually emerges until he becomes an important court official; and from having seen and once spoken to an Emperor he advances until he can write 'I was near the Emperor . . . and was encouraging him'¹ or 'I was in the intimate confidence of Theodora . . . and this was not for the first time.'² However interesting Psellus' life may be, it is this intrusion of the personal element which leads him into such long digressions. Although he carefully says that this habit is permissible in an historical work if the historian remembers to control his wandering pen, δέῃ δὲ τὸν ἱστοροῦντα ταχὺ αὐθις ἐπαρακαλεῖν <τὸ> διαδραμόν-μέρος,³ yet there is something artificial and perfunctory about his digressions, each accompanied by some attempt at an apology; the historian who could write ten chapters on his own retreat to monastic life and then say that he did not wish to introduce his own person into his history⁴ must have been fully conscious of the formal nature of his protest.

Such a man had his prejudices, but in justice to Psellus it must be admitted that he strove to conceal them. For instance he certainly did not like Cerularius,⁵ but all he says is that they were hardly in harmony with each other. Psellus knew that he could not boast of the antiquity of his family, and that he had found favor more for his eloquence than his birth,⁶ but he had a snobbish regard for men of good family, and he speaks disparagingly of the obscurity of those who succeeded Constantine VIII (ἄσημόν τινα τὸν Μιχαήλ).⁷ The qualities which he chose to emphasize were always those which marked a man of education; he despised Basil II who spoke more like a peasant than an educated man. But these were pardonable prejudices for one who felt so strongly that Byzantium had inherited the intellectual wealth of ancient Greece.

However much Psellus omits to tell and however often he digresses to speak of himself, he attempts to sum up in an impartial manner. He tries to show both the good and the bad in Michael IV's administration; he may trace the portraits of Zoe and Theodora with the hand of an artist, yet he says that he must confess that neither of them had any capacity for administration;⁸ though he writes in the reign of Michael VII he says that his father Constantine X did wrong to neglect military affairs and that from this cause came much evil.⁹ If he cannot solve a problem he says so, 'As for me, I count these matters (i.e., the reason for the defeat of Phocas) among the things that remain unsolved and attribute all to the Mother of the Word,'¹⁰ or, 'I should not like to commit myself (i.e., concerning the cause of Romanus III's death) for I do not think to pass sentence lightly concerning matters of which I myself have no knowledge.'¹¹ Psellus is not always

¹ *Ibid.*, VI, 110 (II, 22).

² *Ibid.*, VIIA, 13 (II, 78).

³ *Ibid.*, VI, 70 (I, 151).

⁴ *Ibid.*, VI, 200 (II, 70).

⁵ Cf. the Accusation, ed. L. Bréhier, *Revue des études grecques*, XVI (1903), 375-416, XVII (1904), 35-76; and the correspondence of Psellus and Cerularius, ed. K. N. Sathas, *Bibliotheca graeca medii aevi*, V (1876), *passim*.

⁶ *Chron.*, VIIA, 7 (II, 141).

⁷ *Ibid.*, VII, 91 (II, 9).

⁸ *Ibid.*, VI, 5 (I, 119).

⁹ *Ibid.*, VIIA, 18 (II, 146).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 16 (I, 11).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, II, 26 (I, 50).

content with the recording of events, he tries to find what lies behind them;¹ he shows the means by which Constantine ix came to the throne, he looks for the causes and results of his extravagance (τὰς αἰτίας ζητεῖν καὶ πρὸς ὃ τι τὸ γινόμενον ἀποτελευτήσῃ) where some historians would merely 'praise the Emperor for his liberality.'²

But behind all analysis lay something deeper which even Psellus' insatiable curiosity could not probe. This was the Providence (πρόνοια) that ultimately controlled all things.³ Psellus recognized in the events of history something more than chance, and his Providence, though never openly identified with a Christian conception, is clearly a power that was very different from the supernatural beings, who often became the mediaeval means of explaining what otherwise seemed incomprehensible. Psellus, like Anna Comnena, was scornful of such devices,⁴ and he rarely alludes to any supernatural occurrence. His Providence was something unaccountable, something inevitable, that intervened to redress the balance and to do justice to the injured, and 'no mind could comprehend its measure.'⁵ In telling the story of Zoe's exile and Michael v's fate, Psellus marvels at the unforeseen, and yet ironically just, course which events take; in speaking of Constantine x's accession to the throne, he finds that it was Providence that enabled him to gain his power by legitimate means. For however much Psellus wished to believe that man was a free agent⁶ he saw that it was impossible to eliminate the destiny which was meted out by Providence.

Psellus regarded the βασιλεύς as a divinely ordained instrument, and the *Chronographia* shows that he had a definite reverence for the imperial office. Anna Comnena wrote in praise of a great Emperor, but Psellus' lifetime covered at least seven reigns, none of which could compare with that of Alexius i. His conception of the greatest of all offices is therefore not inspired by an outstanding Emperor, but shows itself as often in criticism of weak rulers as in admiration of the more capable.

Psellus was as ardent an imperialist as Anna, though in the eleventh century the supreme authority of the Basileus did not pass unchallenged by the superior claims of the priesthood.⁷ Cerularius, and this is one of the charges against him in the Accusation, regarded the spiritual authority as definitely superior to the secular, in the sense that he wished to exert his control in both spheres; it was his attempt to unite the two powers that roused Psellus' antagonism, 'in his hand he held the Cross, while from his mouth issued imperial commands.'⁸ The accuracy

¹ Cf. *ibid.*, vi, 97 (ii, 13) where he says that great disasters are often caused by trifling events.

² *Ibid.*, v, 30 (i, 133).

³ *Ibid.*, v, 30 (i, 71), though Psellus preserves individual will by adding 'save in so far as human nature does not deliberately choose evil,' in which case Providence would inevitably punish the wrongdoer.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vi, 96 (ii, 12). Cf. Zonaras, or even Attaliates.

⁵ *Ibid.*, v, 24 (i, 101).

⁶ Psellus, *Omnifaria doctrina*, *Patrologia graeca*, cxxii, col. 733 ff.

⁷ Cf. the faint muttering from a different source that is found in Nicoulitza's ἐγὼ δὲ φημι ὅτι πάντες ἄνθρωποι ἐπὶ ἀνθρώπου τέκνα εἰσι, τοῦ Ἀδάμ, *Cecaumeni strategicon et incerti inscriptoris de officiis regis libellus* (ed. B. Vasilievski and J. Jernstedt, St. Petersburg, 1896), 98.

⁸ Psellus, *The accusation against Cerularius*, Ed. L. Bréhier, *op. cit.*, xvii (1904), 64 (lx).

of Psellus' accusation is not unquestionable, but this particular charge was foreshadowed in a letter which Psellus wrote to the patriarch saying 'You divide mankind and stir up trouble and misery; in your overpowering reverence for God all else counts for nothing. You despise the Emperor and oppose all worldly powers. I cannot deny my monarchical feeling . . . but you, being democratic, despise the monarchy.'¹ This antagonism, however, was never developed in the East as in the West, because, in practice as well as theory, the Byzantine Emperor had a stronger position.

But Psellus never wavers from his allegiance to the imperial authority nor does he hesitate concerning its ultimate source — it is from God.² The empire and the priesthood have been thus divided by God, and to the one he has given the care of public administration, to the other the care of men's souls.³ In close connection with this divine origin stood the coronation ceremony (*τὸ τῆς βασιλείας μυστήριον*), which is mentioned by Psellus, as indeed by other historians, as an essential part of the installation of the Emperor.⁴ The more immediate source of imperial authority is hereditary right, and Psellus shows how deeply rooted this feeling had become: he even marvels at the good fortune which had attended the Macedonian dynasty since its authority was originally not based on any hereditary claim. It seems somewhat incongruous to emphasize the importance of inheritance in a century which saw the long-drawn-out extinction of the Macedonian family, accompanied by one revolution after another. But whatever the exigencies of practical politics, reverence for the hereditary claim was never forgotten, 'the Empire has come to the Empress by right of inheritance (*κατὰ κληρὸν*)' John the Eunuch reminds Michael iv when he was intriguing to secure the succession of Michael v.⁵ And so under this fiction of the inherited power, one man after another dominated Byzantine politics as the consort of Zoe. But, coördinate with the hereditary claim based on special divine favor, was the elective element. There was always the necessity of ratification, but this is specially brought into prominence by the death of the last of the Macedonians; when Michael vi came to the throne it was by choice of the civil party (*τὸ πολιτικὸν γένος*),⁶ even though some semblance of legitimate sanction had been given by the dying Theodora, who placed the crown on his head. The part played by the choice of the people⁷ is a large subject, and it suffices to say here that Psellus recognized its importance, and he evidently thought that the wishes of 'the people, the

¹ Ed. K. N. Sathas, *op. cit.*, v (1876). This letter was probably written at the beginning of Isaac Comnenus' reign before Cerularius' downfall. Cf. B. Rhodius, *Beiträge zur Lebensgeschichte und zu den Briefen des Psellos* (Wissenschaft. Beilage z. d. Progr. d. k. Gymnasiums z. Plauen), Plauen, 1892.

² Cf. Nicoulitza, *op. cit.*, 93, where he speaks of *θεὸς ἐπίγειος* as a commonly used name for the Emperor.

³ Psellus, *Accusation*, *op. cit.*, xvii (1904), 40 ff. (xxxvi ff.). This is the main argument of the charge of usurping the royal power. Since the *Accusation* was written at the command of the Emperor, Isaac Comnenus, it is therefore not completely reliable as a source from which to obtain Psellus' own convictions, but on this point it is in agreement with the evidence of the *Chronographia*.

⁴ *Chron.*, v, 5 (I, 88).

⁵ *Ibid.*, iv, 22 (I, 67).

⁶ *Ibid.*, vii, 1 (II, 83 ff.).

⁷ In practice it was a question of either the civil or the military parties, the latter usually proving the determining factor. Cf. *Chron.*, vi, 29 on the incapacity of 'the people' for comprehending affairs of state.

senate and the army' should be the authoritative element in the event of any interregnum.

The presence of the elective element did not imply that there was any theoretical control over the Emperor. Psellus evidently admired absolute government, but then he regarded the alternative as the submission of a weak Emperor to favorites.¹ On the other hand he certainly never implied that absolute government carried with it any justification of tyranny, for he continually emphasizes the responsibilities which are a condition of imperial office. He never gives any such definite exposition of royal duties as Nicoulitza, because he is writing history and not a political treatise, but we read in different places of the necessity for virtue and high ideals in the Emperor,² of Michael IV's realization that he was responsible to God and men for his conduct of the Empire.³ Psellus felt that he who could not rule well was justly overtaken by an adverse fate.⁴ Combined with this general sense of responsibility, is a very definite ideal of imperial conduct in the various administrative branches, which indicates that, much as Psellus was interested in people, he was neither blind to the needs of the empire, nor devoid of some capacity for statesmanship.⁵

Whatever truth there may be in Skylitzes' criticism of Psellus' capacity as an historian⁶ the *Chronographia* remains one of the most interesting of Byzantine histories. Perhaps the verdict which must be brought against Psellus is that his interests were too wide for him ever to excel in any one thing. Circumstances were certainly against him in the sphere of statesmanship because he obviously had to study the security of his position or else risk his life, but the *Chronographia* shows the shrewd penetration of his worldly wisdom and his not unworthy conception of the imperial dignity. Like his letters, it reveals that enthusiasm which did so much to stimulate the revival of learning and it helps to explain why, in spite of his gifts, he failed to show any of the qualities of an original thinker. Nevertheless Psellus stood high in the estimate of his contemporaries, and justly so, if rather by reason of his work as a scholar, than in his capacity as a counsellor of Emperors. By those who lived in the period of the Comneni he was regarded with veneration. The *Timarion*, probably written in the first half of the twelfth century describes his very favorable reception into the underworld in contrast to that of his successor and pupil, John Italus; Anna Comnena, writing in the days of Manuel, says of him that he had reached 'the summit of all knowledge,'⁷ praise which, if somewhat exaggerated, is at least a fitting tribute to his love of learning.

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¹ *Ibid.*, I, 29 (I, 18).

² *Chron.*, VI, 162 ff. (II, 51-52); VI, 175 (II, 57).

³ *Ibid.*, IV, 42 (I, 78).

⁴ *Ibid.*, V, 14 (I, 95).

⁵ See especially *Chron.*, VII, 1 (II, 83 ff.) and for the importance of the civil and military elements; VII, 51 (II, 114 ff.) for the necessity of a slow and careful policy.

⁶ Cedrenus, *Historiarum compendium*, 4 (Corpus script. hist. byz.). He speaks of inaccurate details and mere lists of Emperors.

⁷ Anna Comnena, *Alexias*, v, 8 (Corpus script. hist. byz. I, 259).